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ABSTRACT

Designed for the special needs of students reading below grade level at Juan Seguin Elementary School (Texas), this pamphlet presents an overview of the High Expectations reading program. The pamphlet identifies whole group instruction as the primary instructional method, although small group instruction is delivered when necessary. An effective practice reported in the pamphlet is having teachers write many of the reading materials for their classes with input from both parents and students in order to design creative class activities. The pamphlet argues that these changes allow for more direct instruction time, more focused planning time, more student-teacher interaction, closer supervision, increased feedback from independent practice, and also give teachers more time to plan instruction because of the focus on one level per class instead of three or four. The pamphlet states that the Texas Education Agency has selected this alternative approach to reading as one of six exemplary and innovative programs that address basic educational needs. (RS)

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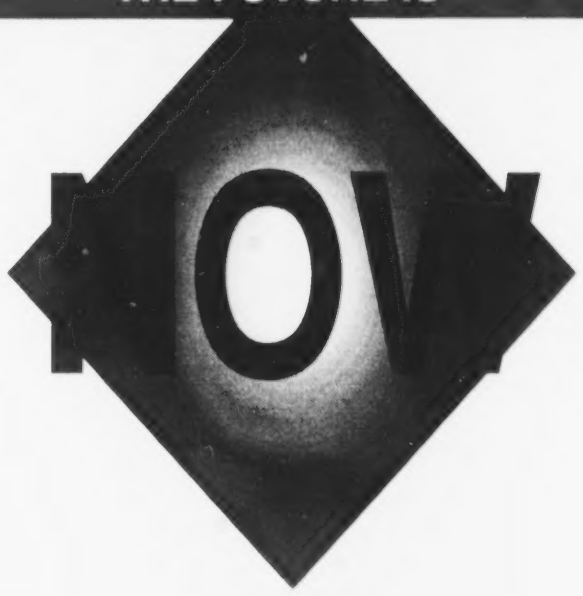

HIGH EXPECTATIONS READING PROGRAM

MCALLEN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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REACH

REALISTIC EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT CAN HAPPEN

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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The Challenge

Though the test scores of students at Juan Seguin Elementary were substantially higher than the average district scores, as long as there were students achieving below grade level, there was work to be done. Rather than being satisfied with the recognition for excellence the school had already received, the principal and staff wanted to improve the work they were doing. They were also aware that a shift in district lines, would in the near future, affect their student population. A large population of low achievers would be gathered into the district by the new boundary lines. To prepare the way for these incoming students, to address the needs of their own low achievers, and to improve the overall reading performance of all students, as well as their own teaching skills, an innovative reading program was adopted.

The challenge was first and foremost a challenge of re-visioning. Was it possible that all children, given sufficient time and correct instructional methods, could learn on grade level? While it was easy to say, "Oh yes, our children can all master the objectives of their own grade," there was still the evidence of years and years of teaching in tracks, in which the lowest achievers never seemed to catch up to or learn at grade level. To maintain the performance prescribed for their grade, to now keep up where students had previously fallen behind, seemed like asking a lot—a lot of both teachers and students.

To the teachers, the challenge was to teach effectively. The question was not simply, "Can the students learn the material designated for their grade level?" but also "can the teachers teach the grade level material to all children?" Principal Rosalinda Hernandez selected teachers who were interested in meeting the challenge the High Expectations program provided. The challenge was not just to try a few new teaching techniques, but to change a way of doing and thinking that they had all participated in for many years.

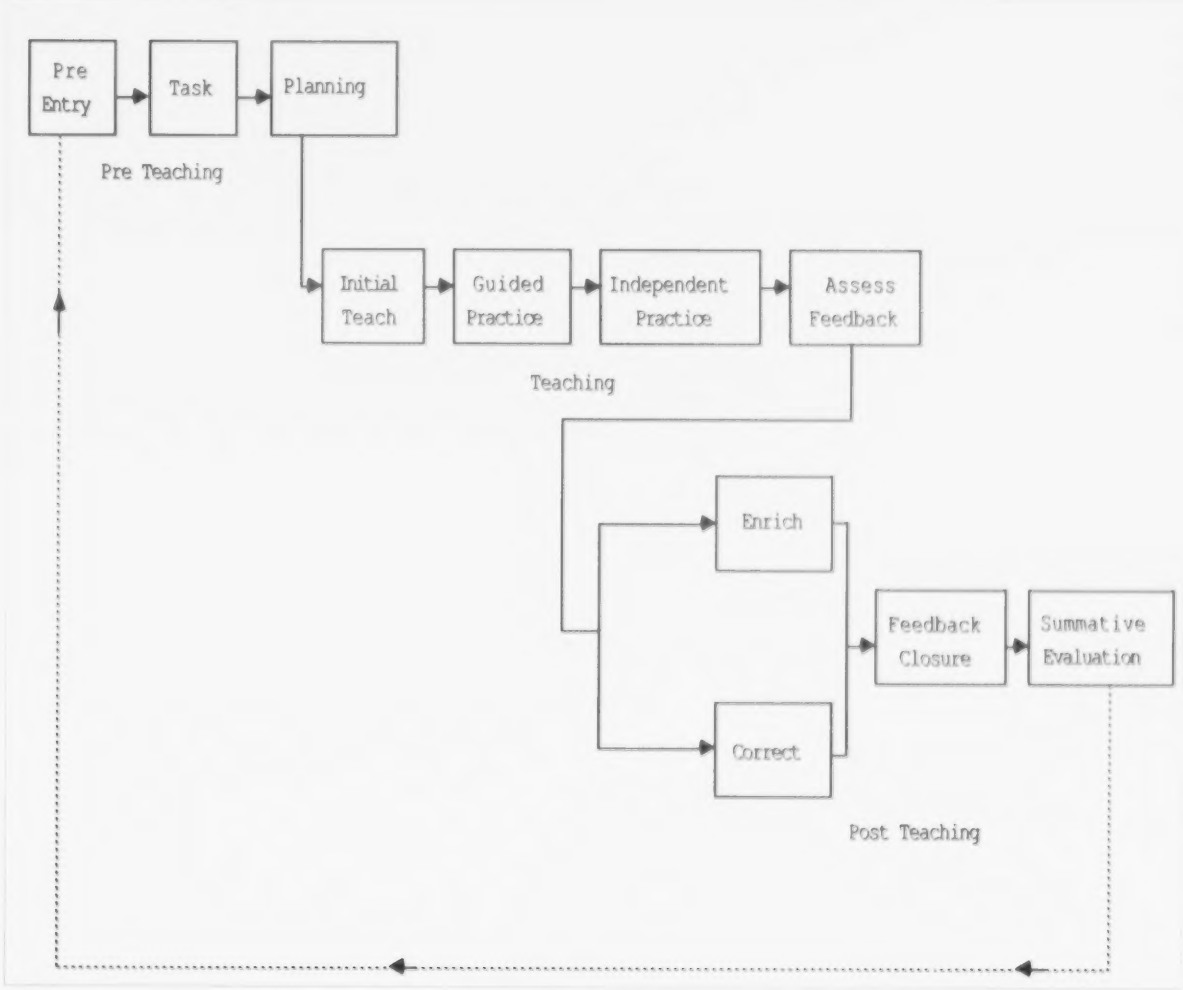
The next step was to adopt teaching methods, techniques, and strategies that would best enable students to learn. Traditional and new expectations were incorporated as teachers worked together to find new and creative ways to support student learning. Stories in the basal readers were augmented with stories written by teachers and students, aimed to hold the students' interest and be relevant to their lives. Passive learning was replaced by active learning, including active thinking. The teachers did constant evaluation as they moved through the class—not waiting for the results of the week's homework, or a test to make shifts in teaching methods for particular students. Much of the teaching time was spent with the whole class, rather than one third of it—and that required new ways of interacting, reinforcing, and planning.

The challenge was a formidable one. Vision, expectations, form, methods, strategies—all were being called into question, all were being challenged in order to better meet the learning needs of the present and future students of Juan Seguin Elementary School.

The Cycle of Instruction

The High Expectations program is built around an instructional delivery system. In the first phase, the teacher presents the material to be mastered in that lesson. In the direct teach phase, students have guided and independent practice with the teacher providing immediate feedback. This is a positive change over the traditional practice in which two-thirds of the class work completely independently.

During the practice segment of this phase, the class may be involved in any number of creative activities--vocabulary bingo, word maps, story writing--the list is limited only by the teachers' creativity. In the final reteach phase, different strategies are used to instruct those who have not yet mastered objectives. Students who have mastered the objectives at an 85% level are offered enrichment activities.



The Benefits

For the students:

- increased positive student self-image
- the ability to stay on grade level
- increased interaction with teacher
- increased motivation to perform
- increased proficiency grade level performance
- greater variety of learning activities
- increased time on task
- relevant and interesting materials

For the teachers:

- increased planning time
- increased instructional time per student
- expression of teacher creativity
- increased expectations of learners
- heavy supplementation of basal readers
- mutual support of other teachers
- the satisfaction of seeing low achievers succeed
- increased interaction with all students

For parents:

- greater interest in learning by their children
- their child's self-esteem is increased
- children are freed from the stigma of grouping
- increased opportunities for involvement in the program
- assurance that children are being taught those skills and objectives necessary to advance in school
- increased expectation of teachers
- open invitation into the classroom

For supervisory staff:

- ability to address a difficult problem
- assurance that grade objectives are taught
- increased potential continuity between grades
- increased cohesiveness and support of teaching staff
- stimulation of creative teaching
- increased commitment of teachers
- an air of excitement and energy in school
- increased expectation of learners by the teachers

Program Cost

The cost of implementing the High Expectations Program is fairly minimal, since it involves shifting resources more than purchasing new or special resources. The basal reader becomes supplementary, and many of the primary materials required for teaching are produced by the teachers. The primary additional cost to normal operation is the hiring of substitute teachers during the period of training and development. This expenditure allows teachers to participate in training within their normal teaching time. Indirect requirements, such as time, are not increased, because one set, instead of three, sets of materials is prepared.

"Excellence...is not an act, but a habit." — *Aristotle*

This document provides an overview of a reading program designed for the special needs of students at Juan Seguin Elementary School. The campus was recognized as "unusually successful" by the U.S. Department of Education through the National School Recognition Program (1985-86). This program's "high expectations" component has been credited for much of the success at this campus. This component was initiated out of a desire to see low achievers operate on grade level. The Texas Education Agency has selected this alternative approach to reading as one of six exemplary and/or innovative programs that address basic educational needs. The program highlights the determination of this campus to raise the reading level of its students.

THE HIGH EXPECTATIONS READING PROGRAM

The Vision

At its most basic level, High Expectations Reading is aimed at increasing the reading ability of students at Seguin Elementary. The vision that surrounds that simple goal, however, is much broader. The High Expectations program extends beyond the limits of traditional reading programs. The assumptions, the methods, the focus of this approach are directed toward the assurance that all students will accomplish the objectives set out for their grade. While the program was initiated partially out of a desire to see low achievers operate on grade level, the expectation was that all students would benefit from this alternative approach.

The primary instruction is whole group although small group instruction is delivered when necessary. Teachers write many of the reading materials for their classes with input from both parents and students and design creative class activities. Instead of totally independent planning for instruction, teachers collaborate on ideas, materials, and teaching strategies. In some cases they team teach. The result of these changes allows more direct instruction time, more focused planning time, more student-teacher interaction, closer supervision, and increased feedback of independent practice. It also gives teachers more time to plan instruction because of the focus on one level instead of three or four.

As intended, higher reading achievement among students has resulted from the High Expectations program. Increased ability to communicate orally, higher student self-esteem, and broadening of experiences have resulted from the program also. The program has accomplished its goal and vision.

REACH

Vol. II, Part 4

Exemplary Program Practices Series

The High Expectations Reading Program is one of six programs highlighted in REACH, Vol. II, Parts 1-6. A training package for each of the six identified programs has been developed and can be requested through the Educational Service Centers. Training package includes: brochure, videotapes, videoguides, workshop outlines, fact sheets, and implementation guides on each of the six practices.

This REACH document is a publication of the Texas Education Agency, Division of Exemplary Programs. The Division's objective is to identify and disseminate information on exemplary and/or innovative school practices throughout Texas. The production and dissemination of this REACH document and associated training materials were conducted by NuStats, Inc. of Austin under the Exemplary Program Practices series contract to TEA. For additional copies of REACH Vol. II, Parts 1-6, please contact Publications Distribution, Texas Education Agency, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin, Texas, 78701-1494 in writing. The cost is $1.00 per copy.